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ABSTRACT

Some of the underlying issues in dialects and language arts are clarified and questions commonly posed by practitioners are addressed. The discussion focuses on speaking and writing, and is organized around four topics: (1) the state of the English language in the United States today; (2) oral language instruction and assessment; (3) written language instruction and assessment; and (4) integrating dialect diversity into language arts. The specific questions addressed deal with issues and problems encountered by classroom teachers. Particular attention is given to the following matters: (1) reasons for the decline in standardized test scores; (2) academic standards as these are related to reading and writing; (3) language differences and the language arts teacher; (4) standard and non-standard dialects; (5) when and how to teach standard spoken English; (6) identifying children with language problems and differentiating between language disorders and dialect differences; (7) teaching writing to speakers of nonstandard dialects; (8) testing writing ability and nonstandard dialect speakers; and (9) the usefulness of providing students as well as teachers with information on dialects. (Author/AMH)

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DIALECTS AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Language Arts and Dialect Differences

Donna Christian

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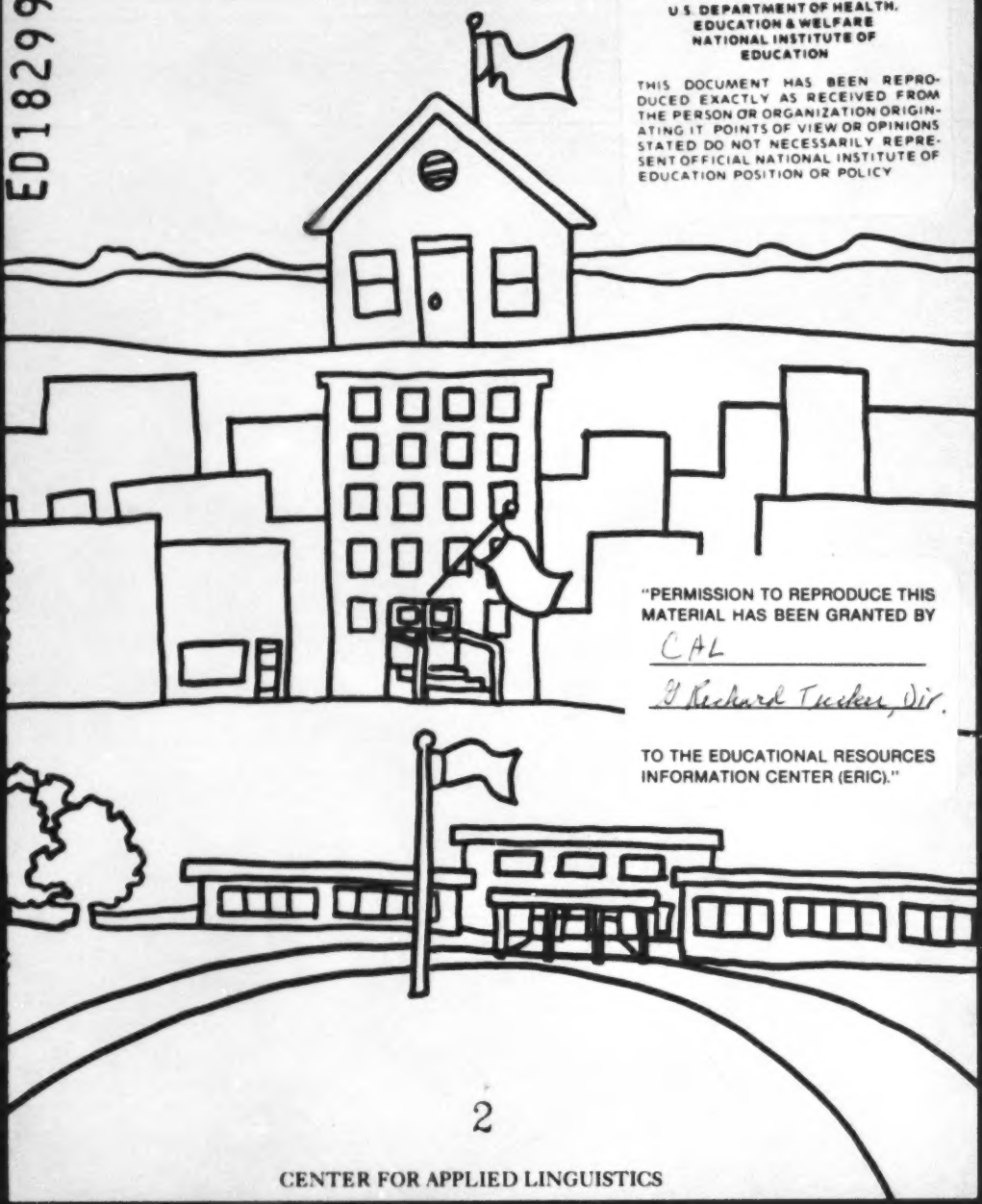

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CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Dialects and Educational Equity

Language inevitably plays a central role in education. It is used as a means of transmitting information and is an essential ingredient in the development and evaluation of particular educational skills. In addition, language is a vehicle of social identification as people react to one another based on the way they speak. The importance of language in education, coupled with its social significance, makes it a key factor in the struggle for educational equity.

Over the past two decades, a great deal of research has been undertaken on language diversity in American English, particularly among the economically impoverished and ethnically and socially isolated members of our society—those groups who speak what has been labeled "nonstandard English." Research on these varieties has raised some fundamental social and educational issues—matters that cannot be ignored by those vested with the responsibility of educating *all* students. ***Dialects and Educational Equity*** attempts to address some of these issues on the basis of what is currently known about language variation.

Our concern is the dissemination of information relevant to the needs of practitioners, and the format of this series is designed to highlight this orientation. Each booklet is arranged in a question-answer format, with the questions representing the kinds of issues raised by practitioners in surveys, workshops, and discussion groups and the answers based on current research information addressing the concerns. The first two booklets, ***Dialogue on Dialects*** and ***Exploring Dialects***, address preliminary concerns about dialect differences while the booklets, ***Speech Pathology and Dialect Differences***, ***Reading and Dialect Differences***, and ***Language Arts and Dialect Differences***, address more specialized educational issues. At the end of each discussion in the booklets, certain other readings are suggested for those who may wish to pursue more information on a particular topic.

Practitioners and researchers in the areas of specialization considered have guided the development of these publications from the initial planning to the final products. In addition, staff consultants at the Center for Applied Linguistics, Roger W. Shuy and Peter A. Eddy, advised on many phases of the project. Lance Potter, of our staff, researched many topics of relevance, and Marlene Zack attended to the fine details of typing the original booklets. Finally, Diane Bartosh, of the Publications Program at the Center for Applied Linguistics, developed the layout and edited the final manuscript. Our appreciation is extended to these individuals, as well as the many anonymous practitioners who originally brought our attention to the issues raised here.

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Preface

In one way or another, all educators are forced to deal with aspects of language arts. Matters of reading, listening, speaking, and writing cannot be avoided, since these activities are central to the education process. In this context, an issue like dialect differences, with its unavoidable impact on language arts and its implications for educational equity, is of great concern to all educators. The dilemma faced by educators is not simple. They are aware of dialect differences, but not always certain of the appropriate response to them. Students from all backgrounds must be treated fairly; at the same time, they must be given adequate preparation for the realities of life. The problems involved with this issue are not always easy to resolve in an equitable and realistic way.

This booklet is an attempt to ferret out some of the underlying issues in dialects and language arts and to find answers to questions commonly posed by practitioners as they work on these complex problems. The discussion is limited here to the productive side of language arts—speaking and writing. Because of the complexities of the issues involved and the independent treatment that is typically given to reading, that segment of language arts is treated separately in the fourth booklet in this series. However, as a comparison of this discussion and the one on reading will substantiate, many of the problems to be dealt with are quite similar. The aim of this booklet is not to make a list of recommendations, although some are offered along the way. Rather, the goal is to clarify the issues involved and to seek out and present relevant information contributing to a resolution.

The final form of discussion presented here has benefited greatly from the input of others. Donald Graves, Bill Levine, and Jessie Roderick have commented on an earlier draft of the present version. Walt Wolfram, co-director of the project, has been involved in all stages of preparation and has contributed a great deal. Grateful thanks are also extended to those practitioners who have made me aware of their concern for the welfare of their students and have helped me to think about the issue of dialect in the context of education.

Donna Christian

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Educators have been criticized lately by people who say children aren't learning the basic skills of reading and writing as well as they used to. They cite test scores that have gone down and they claim that schools are no longer producing good readers and writers. Some say that the English language in America is in decline as well, at least partly because of the way children are being educated. Is this true?

The claims about the declining literacy skills of students today (the so-called "literary crisis") and the related concern over the decline of the language are not based on any set of conclusive evidence. In fact, those who make such claims often lack certain essential information about language and how it works that would clarify the situation considerably. Whether or not it is accurate to say that there is a literacy crisis, we can observe certain changes taking place in education today, new influences and factors that must be dealt with by educators. The area of language arts instruction and assessment falls right in the middle of the educational and social controversy, since it deals precisely with the subject matter under discussion—the ability to produce spoken and written language in a way that meets certain expectations. Educators, particularly those who deal with language arts, have a good deal at stake in this situation. They are the most likely targets for the criticism that students are not learning to use English properly.

Does this mean that the people who say that our language is in trouble are wrong? Is English in deline?

No, the English language is not in decline. Those who say it is tend to collect a number of examples of what they consider to be bad usage and draw conclusions about the entire language and its future from them. Some find that problems in society go hand-in-hand with those in language, as Edwin Newman observes that there is "a wholesale breakdown in the enforcement of rules, and in the rules of language more than most (*Strictly Speaking* 1975)." Television is often blamed for providing a bad influence on the public, and the governmental bureaucracy is cited for providing bad examples of language usage.

Ideas about our "language decline" have become widespread and popular because those who make comments and publish books about this subject tend to be fairly highly respected individuals, such as newscasters and television critics. Their use of language is typically admired, so their opinions carry a great deal of weight, and they may be considered to be "experts" even though they have not actually studied about language. But opinions about language usage can be very different from an understanding of how language actually works. We can draw an analogy from the use and knowledge of machines—you can be very adept at driving a car or using a sewing machine without knowing how all the inner mechanics work.

An interesting point to note is that these concerns about the language are not at all new and are by no means unique to the United States. Similar laments about the decline of English have been voiced in the past. Jonathan Swift, for example, observed early in the eighteenth century that "our language is extremely imperfect" and complained that writers, who should "polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied abuses and absurdities . . ." (from Swift's letter to Harley, 1712, cited by Shuy, "Confronting the Literacy Crisis"). Periodically, it seems, there are outcries about the misuse

of the language, part of a long and very human tradition of insecurity about language. We can be reminded of the time when only Latin was considered a worthwhile language by scholars and European society at large. The vernaculars spoken in various areas (which developed into languages such as French and Spanish) were considered to be vulgar forms of speech and certainly not fit to be written down. So the issues we are dealing with are not as current as we think they are, and they relate to some basic notions about how language functions in society.

What makes these people say that the language is declining?

There are actually two kinds of examples of language use cited as evidence for this position. These examples are seldom differentiated, but they have different implications, particularly in education. One set of examples involves the use of certain nonstandard features of English such as *ain't*, or verb forms like *brung*, which many people consider to be "bad" usage. The other area of criticism deals with a loss of clarity and/or directness in current speech and writing. For example, a television personality complained that a policeman said "the alleged perpetrator exited the vehicle" rather than the simpler and more direct "the suspect got out of the car." He then went on to tell a class of graduating college seniors that their mission would be to "save the English language" since those who should be guarding it are instead "leading the onslaught: the teachers, linguists, and dictionary-makers" (remarks by Dick Cavett reported in the *Washington Post*, May 28, 1979). Other examples cited often involve apparently intentional indirectness, such as the use of the term "fiscal stress" for a big budget problem (mentioned by Edwin Newman in *A Civil Tongue*).

The question of directness and clarity of language is really a matter of style in the use of language. Indirectness is not, however, related to a decline in language, since all of the resources to say things different ways are still available. For example, if our language limited us to saying "alleged perpetrator" rather than "suspect," we might say that the power of the language had been lessened and could no longer express some concepts directly. However, there is no evidence that English has been so diminished. In fact, in some cases, we might even want to say that the resources are being used rather imaginatively to create certain effects (consider "previously owned" as opposed to "used car"). Some unclear uses of language are due to social pressures on an individual to adopt an unfamiliar style, as in those cases where someone feels a need to sound more educated, or use "fancier" language. Other instances of indirectness are intentional and designed for specific purposes (for example, to cover up the truth or not "directly lie"). In either case, the language use is a product of particular social forces acting upon language, and the "choice of words" is in response to those forces. The language itself is not necessarily affected.

The other strand of criticism relates more directly to the topic discussed here. Some comments attribute the decline of language to a failure to maintain the rules of good grammar and usage. Presumably, these are the rules of what is considered to be standard English, and the failure to maintain them manifests itself both in the speech and writing of various segments of our society. Those who take this stance lack an understanding of two basic characteristics of language (all languages, not just English). First, there are a number of different dialects of the language, all of which have been shown to be equally logical and rule-governed; second, they are not all standard dialects since they are not all equally valued by society. The second observation comes from research on the history of language—*language change is inevitable*. Just as today's English has evolved from the English of Shakespeare's time, it is evolving right now toward some future form which will be just as different from today's version.

Studies have also documented that a typical reaction to change is resistance; that is, speakers often feel the new alternatives being introduced are not as good as the old ones. Change, in itself, however, is neither good nor bad.

Even if the English language isn't in trouble, that doesn't change the fact that test scores are down. Many people say this is due to the lowering of standards in the schools. Is this why children don't seem to be able to read and write as well as they used to?

Evidence about standards being lower today than in the past is really rather questionable. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, collected compositions from students at different age levels in 1970 and 1974. By comparing the two sets of compositions, their report showed no decrease in the basic mechanical skills related to writing—spelling, use of standard English grammar, etc. Other evidence has also been collected to this effect.

The widely publicized decline in certain standardized test scores (such as the SAT's) is indisputable, and a number of reasons have been suggested to account for the decline. A major part of the explanation seems to lie in the increased participation of students from nonmainstream communities in the education process at all levels, but especially in higher education (beyond high school). This is a situation quite different from that found not too many years ago, when those students who sought to extend their education beyond high school were a fairly homogeneous group. They shared, for the most part, a common variety of English and a common cultural background; in today's culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, this no longer holds.

What does the diversity in the schools have to do with test scores?

Test scores are related to diversity in that the tests are not always appropriate for all the groups to whom they are administered. Since, for the most part, they were designed for the earlier homogeneous groups of students, they reflect the language and culture of that segment of society. Studies of individual tests have shown that, rather than measuring what they claim to (like intelligence or aptitude), many tests instead measure knowledge of standard forms of the language. This means that the standardized test may contain biases against various student groups that are entering the test population, resulting in somewhat lower scores for those groups. For example, a test of intelligence might require the student to identify a sentence like *He go to work every day* as unacceptable. For speakers of a standard dialect, the correct response is obtained from the way they speak. For speakers of other dialects, however, this sentence might reflect an acceptable speech pattern, in that it follows a regular pattern or rule of the test taker's dialect. In order to respond correctly to the question then, these students must suppress an answer based on their own speech, and appeal to some other knowledge. As research has shown, no dialect is inherently more organized in its structure than another, nor is one more logical than any other; therefore, a test of standard English can in no way be construed to be a measure of intelligence, or anything else for that matter, except knowledge of standard English. Reports from various disciplines concerning bias in tests indicate that declining scores are at least partly due to the combination of more diverse groups taking the tests and test biases.

How can information about language differences be helpful to a language arts teacher in the classroom?

Information about the nature of dialects and differences between them can form a crucial part of the preparation for language arts teachers, since they deal precisely with this area of education. ("Language arts" is intended here as a label for the receptive skills of reading and listening and the productive skills of writing and speaking as they are typically treated in education. The term also covers a wider range of creative activities, such as drama, but these will not be dealt with here.) They need to realize that all speakers of a language speak a dialect of that language, for example, so that they do not assume that only certain members of their classes speak dialects (the nonstandard dialect speakers). An understanding of the rule-governed nature of all dialects, and their inherent linguistic equality, may keep them from forming unfair opinions of the intelligence or success potential of certain students because of their speech patterns. These opinions can have significant effects on students. Specific information about language differences, or the ways in which dialects differ, will aid teachers in distinguishing true language disorder or learning disability from a simple language difference. Unfortunately, in many classrooms, students whose community language patterns are different from those of the mainstream community have been diagnosed as having disorders of various types. In reality, their acquisition of language patterns with reference to their community is no different from that of any standard dialect speaker. It's just that the community language norms are different.

Are there particular areas within language arts where information about dialect differences is particularly important?

Not really. Information about language is crucial in just about every phase of education, since language plays such an important role, whether it is the focus of attention—as in language arts—or simply the vehicle for the transmission of content in other subject areas. In our discussion here, we can single out the productive aspects of language use, that is, the areas of speaking and writing, for closer examination. It is most likely that if dialect differences are going to play a role in what goes on in the classroom, they will at least be obvious in these two areas. Some of the difficult questions that need to be faced by language arts teachers are:

Should standard English be taught to all students?

Is it unfair to some students to demand that standard English be used by all students?

How can other matters be assessed (such as literacy skills) when dialect differences may be involved?

Reading, another aspect of language arts, has become a highly complex area for study in its own right, and the issue of dialect differences in relation to reading has been widely discussed. In order to cover the issues particularly related to reading in an adequate manner, the topic is discussed separately in the fourth booklet in this series, *Dialect Differences and Reading*. Here we will concentrate on the speaking and writing sides of language arts. As we will see, dialect diversity not only creates certain problems that must be dealt with, it also provides a valuable resource that can enrich a language arts program.

Suggested Readings

Edwin Newman's books, *Strictly Speaking* and *A Civil Tongue*, present the view that English is declining because of the way Americans use it. They are entertaining collections of examples of indirectness and lack of clarity in language use, but the points made in this first section should be kept in mind while reading them. The first booklet in this series, *Dialogue on Dialects*, focuses more on the nature of dialects and attitudes toward them. One response to the so-called literacy crisis has been the "back-to-basics" movement. For a discussion of "back-to-basics" and a closer look at the literacy question, Roger Shuy's "Basics: A Beginning Teaching Strategy" can be consulted. Finally, on the topic of the test scores for various dialect groups, "Levels of Sociolinguistic Bias in Testing" by Walt Wolfram provides an interesting and extensive discussion.

ORAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

Many children come to school speaking a nonstandard dialect because that is the kind of language they have heard at home. Should any effort be made to change or, as some people might say, "correct" obvious examples of nonstandard usage?

This question really gets at the heart of many of the educational concerns relating to language differences between groups of students. If it were possible to teach standard English to groups from culturally different communities quickly and successfully, then this might provide a rather simple solution to all the problems. If there were a social advantage to speaking standard English, then, after a short time, all the students would share the same advantage. Also, problems of language interference (in reading, writing, test taking) would be eliminated. On first glance then, the solution might seem obvious—teach these students to speak standard English. However, the answer is not nearly as simple as that.

One issue that must be faced immediately is the matter of *equity*. There has been considerable debate on this issue of teaching standard English in the linguistic and education literature. Many of those who oppose it feel that no matter how it is done, it is a discriminatory action. The only solution, they would maintain, is to change society's attitudes toward various dialects, so that all varieties of English would be accepted. Since, as research evidence shows, dialects are inherently equal, there is no linguistic reason per se to ask someone to change the way they speak. Any advantage gained is social, and the educational gains that might come must be weighed against the costs. Certain students would inevitably be singled out, and because the instruction would look like remediation, it would be easy for others to assume that these students had some sort of deficit. Also, if other educational programs were postponed, problems could be created by the delay, leading to inequality of opportunity from another source.

Proponents of teaching standard English, on the other hand, argue that it is a necessary tool for success, and schools are responsible for providing students with this tool. Since community attitudes are extremely difficult to change, there may be good reason to consider certain kinds of instruction in standard English rather than waiting

for attitudes to be altered. The actual course of action taken in response to dialect differences in the schools ultimately depends on the beliefs and goals of the individual teacher, the school, and the community. Experience in school programs quickly indicates how important each link in this chain is in implementing any program decision.

Are there any guidelines that can be followed in making the decision about teaching standard English?

A very general recommendation can be made. Whatever decision is reached about standard English, the people involved should be aware of the facts of the language and culture situation and should have enough information to make a choice and understand its consequences. Research that has been conducted on the role of language differences in education points to the need for accurate information no matter which position is taken with respect to teaching standard English. This information can affect the philosophy behind any program involving speakers of different dialects, its priorities, and many aspects of instruction.

Two viewpoints toward speakers from different dialect groups are often labeled the **deficit** and **difference** positions. Briefly, those who adhere to the first position believe that speakers of certain dialects have a handicap because of the language system they have acquired—they have a cognitive or language *deficit*. According to the *difference* position, on the other hand, the language systems of various groups of speakers may differ, but no one system is inherently better than any other. Thus, there is no reason to assume that using a particular dialect can be associated with having any kind of deficit. Research evidence that has been collected clearly supports the difference position, pointing to the conclusion that variation in language is a natural reflection of cultural and community differences.

The fact that language differences do not represent deficiencies is an important premise for any education program, whether or not the choice is made to teach oral standard English. Studies of the effect of teacher attitudes have shown that lowered expectations about certain children can lead to lower performance by them. When some students are regarded as having deficits because of the way they speak, such lower expectations may often result. According to some studies, this may well be the most significant and damaging outcome of dialect differences in the schools.

Priorities should also be carefully considered. Studies of attitudes have shown that use of nonstandard grammatical forms is much more negatively viewed than use of nonstandard pronunciation features. Given this observation, a school might decide that grammatical usage, not pronunciation, should be the focus for oral language instruction. Alternatively, the focus might be set on writing rather than oral language, since the ability to speak a standard dialect may not be as crucial for later success as the ability to use standard forms in writing. One investigator (Burling, *English in Black and White*) identified the following priority list (arranged from highest to lowest) in terms of the language skills in a classroom setting:

1. Ability to understand the spoken language of the teacher.
2. Ability to make oneself understood to the teacher.
3. Ability to read and understand conventional written English.
4. Ability to speak with standard grammar.
5. Ability to write with the conventions of standard written English.
6. Ability to speak with standard pronunciation.

Considering where, in a list of educational priorities, the use of oral standard English falls is an important step in deciding how, or if, it will be emphasized in the education program.

Finally, it is necessary to have accurate information about the features of dialects that are playing a role in the classrooms, whether or not an active program to teach standard English is chosen. The ability of educators to identify language features that are intrinsic parts of the dialects spoken by their students is important for several reasons. In screening children for language disorders, this information is needed to discriminate between features of a particular community's dialect and language behavior that indicates a possible disorder. There is evidence that these two things are sometimes confused, and children have been misdiagnosed as a result. In other forms of assessment, such as intelligence testing, the influence of dialect differences on the results should be carefully examined, and specific information is needed in order to do that. If the decision is made that standard English at some level is a priority, then, of course, this information becomes a focal point for planning an organized and well thought out program.

It seems like schools have been working at getting all children to use oral standard English for a long time. Yet a lot of people continue to use nonstandard forms. Why do these different dialects persist?

The factor that is probably most responsible for success (or lack of it) in teaching someone to speak a standard dialect is motivation. Closely related to this is the group reference factor in language learning. The relationship between learning and motivation is well established. Research on numerous situations of language learning has shown that desire on the part of the learner to become a member of the group represented by the speakers of the new language variety is a crucial motivational factor in learning success. In other words, if students from different communities identify with standard English speaking groups, the chances are better that they will learn standard English; students who have no desire for such identification will probably resist all attempts to teach them standard English.

A number of strong reasons also exist for using a nonstandard dialect. Despite the fact that prestige is typically attached to standard English in some situations, evidence shows that certain positive values may also be associated with speaking a nonstandard dialect. Speaking a certain way can convey an impression of physical strength—"toughness," forthrightness, intimacy, etc.—and these traits are often tied up with different nonstandard varieties. This can be demonstrated by contrasting two versions of a message that could be used in a situation where toughness would be valued:

Him and me ain't goin' nowhere 'til you get out.

He and I aren't going anywhere until you get out.

The first one would clearly be more effective in this situation. In addition, different varieties may contribute to a feeling of social and/or ethnic identity. The factor of solidarity, or "group reference," can thus be an important motivation for maintaining a nonstandard dialect of English.

The group reference factor also plays a role because of the students' relationships with their home communities. They must continue to interact and participate in the home setting and with peer groups. In order to maintain these important ties, the native dialect will probably need to be retained even after a standard dialect is acquired. This ability to use two dialects to interact in different settings is generally referred to as **bidialectalism** (like bilingualism it refers to knowledge of two languages), and this is often put forth as the most reasonable goal for an oral language instruction program that deals with dialect differences.

Given the role of the standard dialects in the education system and in society at large, a school system may decide to take some steps to provide all their students with the ability to speak a standard variety of English. How can this be done most effectively?

In developing a program for teaching spoken standard English, certain general guidelines should be followed:

- *The teaching of standard English must take into account the importance of the group reference factor.* Attempting to provide external sources of motivation for the students is one way of dealing with this factor; another way may be to make programs of instruction in standard English optional rather than obligatory, so that some motivation may be assumed for those who enroll.

- *The goals for teaching spoken standard English should be clearly recognized in the teaching program.* Two goals that have been discussed are *bidialectalism* (adding standard English while maintaining the native dialect) and *eradicationism* (learning standard English to replace the native dialect). The goal of bidialectalism is generally recognized as the preferable one, but it is not so easily incorporated into a teaching program. It is important to recognize the appropriateness of different dialects for different contexts. A program with this goal, for instance, should include contexts where the nonstandard dialect is more appropriate as well as those where the standard dialect might be more acceptable.

- *The teaching of standard English should be coupled with information on the nature of dialect diversity.* By giving students information about various dialects, including their own, this component will reinforce the integrity of their native dialect as a language system.

- *The teaching of standard English should be based on an understanding of the systematic differences between the standard and nonstandard forms.* Both materials and aspects of instruction can benefit from this information. For example, in sequencing topics for presentation, it has been suggested that instruction should begin with areas where standard/nonstandard rule differences have more general effects, before moving to more restricted features. Discussion of a general rule like negation in English (where standard English *I can't get any* corresponds to nonstandard *I can't get none*) would precede the treatment of a feature involving a single vocabulary item.

- *The dialect of spoken standard English taught should be realistic in terms of the language norms of the community.* The goal of instruction should be the standard dialect of the local community, not some formal dialect of English that is not actually used in the area.

What is the best way to teach spoken standard English?

Many of the programs that have been suggested for teaching spoken standard English as a second dialect borrow heavily from the techniques used for teaching foreign languages. In many ways the situations are similar, since in both cases, the aim is to provide students with access to another language system to be used in the appropriate circumstances. The situations differ, of course, in that two varieties of English

have a lot more in common than two separate langauges. This means that there is no need to start at the very beginning and build up the entire language system, as is necessary in learning a totally new language. Instead, a systematic comparison of the local nonstandard variety with the local standard dialect will yield certain areas of difference, and the wide range of shared features will not need to be considered.

How can foreign language teaching methodology be adapted for use in teaching a second dialect?

Approaches to teaching spoken standard English using methods from foreign language teaching (often from English as a second language programs) generally adopt the various drill techniques for practicing language structures. If such an approach is taken, these drills can focus on the specific areas of difference between dialects, providing concentrated practice.

A program developed in New York City is representative of this approach (*Nonstandard Dialect*, by the New York City Board of Education). A number of activities are proposed to help students acquire a variety of standard English in addition to their native variety. Some of these activities are directed at providing an understanding of the nature of dialects and a motivation for acquiring a second dialect. Others pertain directly to the practice of structures that have standard and nonstandard alternants, and reflect the principles of drills used in foreign language teaching. These drills include simple **repetition** of a model and **conversion** of structure (such as statements into questions) as well as a variety of exercises using **dialogues** as a base.

One modification of this adaptation of foreign language teaching techniques has also been suggested. In order to actively promote the goal of bidialectalism, some investigators feel that it is important to include sentences from both the nonstandard and standard dialects in the drills. According to this method, students practice translation between the dialect versions, so that if the teacher says *She drive a car*, the students respond *She drives a car*, and vice versa (focusing on presence of the verb ending -s). These drills are designed to emphasize the fact that the standard variety is being added to a student's repertoire rather than replacing the native dialect. The approach incorporating two-way translation has not met with complete acceptance, however. Some educators have objected to the use of nonstandard forms in the classroom, since they feel that it will make the acquisition of standard English more difficult.

One of the major problems with these methods is boredom, but the drills have been used successfully in certain situations. As an alternative or supplement to drills, some investigators advocate the use of role playing in the classroom. According to this strategy, students learn and practice alternative dialect patterns as they act out a part in a short dramatic situation. They can assume roles like that of a salesman, doctor, newspaper reporter, or office worker where they must try to be as realistic as possible and approximate the speech styles of people from different backgrounds. This activity gives the student the opportunity to vary verbal styles and deliberately switch to a variety of alternant dialect patterns. It also gives students practice in certain real life situations where the use of standard English forms may be crucial, such as in a job interview. The use of role playing, combined with a small amount of explicit instruction in standard English structures, has been proposed as the most practical approach if specific attention is going to be given to the use of spoken standard English.

Is it possible to make any progress teaching children standard English when they continue hearing another dialect at home? It

seems like all the work in the classroom would be cancelled by the way they talk all weekend.

In principle, the language in the home situation should not pose a real barrier to learning other language forms in school. Children in families that move from one English speaking area to another can usually adapt quickly to the regional dialect spoken in their school, even when their parents maintain a different dialect because of their background. In the same way, children whose home language is not English can usually succeed in learning English and using it in the school setting and with friends while maintaining a different language with their family.

In the case of a nonstandard dialect, the contexts outside of school may have a greater influence because of the group reference factor discussed earlier. If the native dialect of English fills this function—in that it indicates solidarity in a social or ethnic sense—the positive values attached to it many make it much more important to an individual than a standard dialect. In this case, the second dialect may not be learned as quickly, because the home variety remains the predominant means of communication.

When should instruction in a second dialect begin?

The optimum age for second dialect learning to begin has not been established in the research literature, but studies that have been done on foreign language learning can provide some guidance. Because of the common assumption that children can learn a new language system more easily than adults can, many programs advocate beginning second language (or dialect) instruction as early as possible. However, results of research studies have shown that this assumption is not always an appropriate guideline. There may be some advantage in early childhood due to certain characteristics of brain development, but there are other significant factors that affect language learning to a much greater degree. For example, the length of time of contact with a second language system is an important factor, regardless of the age at which the contact began. In some situations, adults may actually be more efficient language learners.

Some investigators advocate postponing instruction in a second dialect until the students can appreciate the social significance of different dialects of English. One observer (Burling, *English in Black and White*) concludes:

> ... I maintain that the major effort of the primary school should be in reading and that instruction in speaking Standard English can safely wait until later. ... By clearly separating the task of learning to read from the task of learning to produce a new oral style, and by postponing all explicit attention to the second task until the child is old enough to be well motivated, both tasks might be greatly simplified.

Schools often have screening procedures for identifying children with oral language problems, and sometimes it is left up to the teacher to recommend therapy for particular children. If dialect differences are not language disorders, then children who speak different dialects should not be

sent to therapy. How can a teacher tell a dialect difference from a disorder?

The key consideration in determining a difference as opposed to a disorder is the language norm of the community from which the speaker comes. Individuals whose speech and language are not appropriate for those norms are the ones who may show genuine disorders. The most effective basis for discriminating dialect difference from language disorder comes from an understanding of normal language variation and knowledge about the local dialects.

Teachers may not only need to discriminate difference from disorder within their own classroom, but they may need to be able to react to classifications, and possible misdiagnoses, on the part of others. For example, a student from a Black working-class community may use the form *f* to correspond with what other speakers pronounce as a *th* sound, saying *birfday (birthday), toof (tooth),* and *baf (bath).* If this student were to be diagnosed as having a pronunciation disorder, the teacher would be in a position to make certain observations that would clarify the situation. First of all, in the student's speech, the *f* pronunciation is used only in the middle and ends of words, never in the beginning (as in *thick*). Secondly, other speakers from the community in which the student lives have a similar pronunciation characteristic in their speech. Considering these facts in conjunction with other knowledge about dialect differences, the teacher could conclude that the student was using a regular rule of the community dialect. The teacher would also be able to argue against the diagnosis of disorder that had been made.

Aren't there some tests that can be given to children to see if they need help from a speech therapist because of a language disorder?

There are, but they don't always take into account dialect differences. Therefore, scores achieved on these tests are a problem. In some tests, responses that reflect a nonstandard feature in speech are considered wrong, and the tests may contain items specifically designed to examine standard English features. Thus, a speaker of a nonstandard dialect might get more questions wrong than a standard English speaker simply because of the dialect acquired, not because of any disorder. In addition to the actual items of the test, bias may be introduced at the level of the norming of the test, if it is standardized. When a test is normed on a northern population, for instance, these norms may not be at all appropriate for students from a southern working-class community, due to language and culture differences. Bias at both these levels is part of the reason it is difficult to rely on standardized test results for diagnosis of oral language disorders. (Questions of oral language assessment are dealt with more thoroughly in the third booklet of this series, *Speech Pathology and Dialect Differences.*)

Suggested Readings

The issues surrounding the oral language question in education have been widely debated in the literature. Two collections of articles give full discussions of many of the questions raised in this section: *Teaching Standard English in the Inner City,* edited by Ralph W. Fasold and Roger W. Shuy, and *Research Bases for Oral Language Instruction,* edited by Thomas D. Horn. Robbins Burling also provides a good treatment of

how the standard English question can be dealt with in the schools in the final chapters of *English in Black and White*. The position against teaching standard English is represented in the writing of James Sledd, including his articles "Bidialectalism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy" and "Doublespeak: Dialectology in the Service of Big Brother." Whereas many of the other treatments mentioned above advocate various degrees of use of standard English in the schools, Sledd argues that any such policy has a racist motivation.

WRITTEN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

Developing writing skills is an important goal for any language arts program. It certainly seems as if the way you speak will affect the way you write. How does the spoken dialect of a student relate to writing?

Until recently, many researchers operated on the assumption that writing was basically "speech written down." As a result, many believed that spoken standard English was a prerequisite for writing in acceptable standard English. Recent research has considered writing as a more independent process, with its own characteristics and problems. As a manifestation of language, it certainly shares much with speech, but it has its own properties as well.

Spoken dialect relates to writing in several different ways. For all speakers, there are differences between the language style that is considered appropriate for speaking and the language considered appropriate for writing. This gap is larger or smaller depending on the style of speaking considered (formal lecture versus intimate conversation) and the type of writing (personal letter versus scientific report). There are, of course, certain problems that all children face in learning to write, in transforming the language system they have for speaking into written forms of communication. For speakers of nonstandard dialects, there are some additional factors to be considered, largely because the gap is wider between the language of their speaking styles and the written styles. Certain parts of the writing process may reflect the influence of the nonstandard dialect, but there is no evidence that this influence is strong enough to require that standard English be spoken before it can be written.

What kinds of problems are faced by all children in learning to write?

In addition to the obvious mechanical aspects of learning to write (handwriting, orienting the written material on a page, punctuation), many of the early difficulties shared by all writers stem directly from language-related matters. Investigators have noted two basic areas where the two modes of communication differ. One involves learning particular features of written language, while the other is a more general problem of accommodating the special demands of the writing situation.

The first area is actually a problem of language style. The features that need to be learned can be found at many levels of language, from vocabulary and grammar differences through the ways in which longer stretches of discourse can be used. For example, the use of a phrase like "a good deal of trouble" would probably be preferred

in writing over the more commonly spoken "a lot of trouble." The use of conversational features like *you know, well,* or even the use of questions directed at the audience is considerably restricted in writing. In many forms of writing, it is not appropriate to use the first person perspective, so that rather than using the form *I think square dancing is very popular,* a writer might say *Square dancing seems to be* very popular, or *It seems that* . . . , and so forth. These are just a few of the features of the written language which a student must eventually learn in order to become a successful writer.

The second area of difference, the actual circumstances surrounding the acts of writing and speaking, involves differing demands on the communicator. One difference, the fact that writing is received visually, means that any information that would have been conveyed through different voice qualities (such as stress and intonation in speaking) has to be provided in another way. For example, the difference between a compound word, as in *a blackbird,* and a phrase, *a black bird,* is a matter of stress in speaking, but is converted to a spacing difference in writing. Similarly, questions which may be indicated by intonation in speech (*John took a boat?*) have to be marked by special punctuation in writing. Some investigators have noticed ways in which children will "put the sound back in" in their early writing. Expressive features are often added in very imaginative ways, such as indicating heavier stress by darkening the letters of a word, or use of different numbers or sizes of exclamation points to show different degrees of intonation. These strategies are attempts at reconciling the differences between speech and writing.

The most significant difference between writing and speaking situations, according to many studies, is the role of the hearer/reader. In spoken language, the hearer is present and available to give crucial feedback as to whether more information is needed and whether or not the message is being understood. The speaker can then adjust appropriately. In writing, the receiver of the communication is absent, and the writer must take care to consider the perspective of this absent, and often unknown, reader. Shared knowledge can no longer be relied upon to fill in gaps in the message. References must often be made explicit or the reader will be confused. Taking into account the absent reader has been suggested as one of the most difficult steps to make for the child beginning to write. An early writer might report on vacation activities with *We went to visit grandma. Ginger went too* . . . , with the fact assumed that Ginger is a dog. Some investigators have suggested that this ability to adapt the communication form relates to Piaget's notion of the egocentricity of the developing child—a factor which may influence the development of writing skill. They recommend that early writing not be concerned with this, although later writing instruction should help children develop their growing awareness of the reader.

Are there any special problems that are faced by children who come to school speaking a nonstandard dialect?

Recent research has shown that speaking a nonstandard dialect probably has less direct influence on development of writing skill than was once thought. Speakers of all dialects encounter difficulties like those just mentioned. This does not mean, however, that the dialect of English spoken by the student can be ignored by the writing teacher.

Since the gap between spoken language and written styles is wider for the nonstandard dialect speaker than the standard English speaker, some students may seem to take longer to acquire some aspects of writing skill than others. Actually, they are making a bigger transition. Depending on previous experience, the written style of language may not be as familiar to these students.

Another problem may arise because the spoken language differences manifest themselves in writing. Thus, a student may write *a* as the form of the indefinite article before both a consonant and a vowel (e.g., *a farm* and *a apple*) if this is how it is spoken. When faced with a great deal of correction in these areas, students may be hesitant to try again. Also, they may make other, different errors in an attempt to avoid certain usages from their spoken dialect (a phenomenon known as **hypercorrection**). After numerous instances of correction, a student might avoid using a structure or begin using structures like *an car* or *an farm*. Such usages would not appear in speech at all, but they represent an effort to "catch" these errors.

A further difficulty that comes from dialect influence relates to more formal assessments. Although the errors in writing stemming from dialect features are actually relatively minor in terms of the goals of writing, they are often of major importance in formal evaluation. Examination of various standardized tests has shown that points of mechanics and standard English usage are often the primary measure of writing ability, putting the speakers of nonstandard dialects at a disadvantage in terms of how they will be rated. For example, students' writing ability may be assessed formally by their ability to distinguish between the use of *good* and *well*, or the past usage of *come* (*Yesterday he come to school*) and *came*.

Are there any guidelines that can be followed when teaching writing to speakers of nonstandard dialects?

The most prevalent recommendation is that an awareness of and knowledge about different dialects is an important ingredient for any program of language arts instruction. There is also fairly widespread agreement that the ability to write in standard English is an important skill, even among those who would not advocate teaching spoken standard English. Although the research base is still fairly small, both in terms of investigations about the writing process itself and about the role of a student's dialect background, there are some observations that can be made.

In the process of teaching written standard English, it is useful for the teacher to distinguish at least three different types of problems in writing:

- *Organization or logical progression of an argument or narrative.* Difficulties here are quite common to nearly everyone who learns how to write, and they are not particularly related to dialect differences. In a beginning writer, this may take the form of a tendency to "jump ahead" while writing. For example, a writer may give a sequence such as *We went to visit grandma. Ginger went too. We were glad to find her*, where intermediate information (Ginger was lost) is missing. Or, an organization problem might stem from the information assumed by the writer, as found in the assumption about Ginger being a dog. More mature writers may evidence different kinds of organizational problems.
- *Mechanical aspects of writing.* The conventions of capitalization and the use of punctuation marks, for example, are aspects of the English system that all speakers of English must master, regardless of their dialect. Every person learning to write has to learn the different spellings of *two*, *too*, and *to*, or the fact that sentences and proper names capitalize the first letter.
- *Dialect differences.* In these cases, grammatical differences or spelling errors may be based on influence from the spoken language. For example, spelling *tinder* and *tender* the same way may be related to the factor that these words are pronounced the same in southern dialects; the use of double negatives, as in *He didn't do nothing*, may relate to a dialect which regularly uses this grammatical rule. In the strictest sense, these are not really errors, but rather are the reflection in writing of the differences in

grammar, pronunciation, and verbal expression between the students' dialect and the standard dialect against which the writing is being judged.

What are some indications of dialect influence in writing that a teacher might encounter?

Both direct and indirect influence from dialect can be observed in writing. Direct influence can be observed when a nonstandard dialect feature that is used in speech occurs in writing. Indirect influence is seen when dialect has an effect on the written form other than through a direct reflection.

The following sample of writing, composed by a ninth grader from a Black working-class community, illustrates the different dimensions of writing problems. The sample was written in response to a question following a reading passage:

> I would prefer living the way the Hunzakuts live. because they live a whole lot longer and they don't have no crime and they don't get sick and if you are the age of 60, or 80 you still can play many game like your the age of 6 or 9 and don't have to worry about Cancer or Heartattacks. Its would be a whole lot better living their way.

An evaluation of this sample would need to deal with organization (the amount of information included in the first sentence), mechanics (the period in the first line, or the capitalization and lack of separation between the words in "Heartattacks"), and dialect influence. Also, the failure to maintain stylistic differences between written and spoken language is revealed in the use of the impersonal pronoun form *you* (... *if you are the age of 60*) instead of the more typical written forms (e.g., *a person, one,* etc.).

In looking for direct reflections of dialect in this writing sample, we are examining it at a very surface level of the composition. Given certain knowledge about the student's spoken dialect, we can identify some instances of direct influence. For example, *they don't have no crime* is an instance of multiple negation, a common feature in dialects of English. The absence of the plural ending in *many game* is also a candidate for a problem of dialect influence. This can be contrasted with the use of *your* in *your the age of 6* . . . which is a mechanical error. All speakers of English share the problem of writing words that sound alike but are spelled differently in various uses (*your* and *you're* are like *break* and *brake* in this respect).

How can you tell when there is an indirect influence from a student's dialect in writing?

Studies have documented indirect influences from a spoken nonstandard dialect in two respects. One is a type of hypercorrection (mentioned earlier) which occurs because of a sensitivity to, and some confusion about, a particular structure. In the composition given above, the construction *its would be* seems to be an example of this phenomenon. A fairly common feature for speakers with backgrounds like that of the writer is the absence of the *are* and *is* verbs in sentences like *they nice* or *she here*. In writing, this feature is likely to have appeared and been corrected, rather frequently, resulting in a sensitivity to the problem of leaving those verbs out. The unnecessary addition of *s* on *its* in the case of *its would be*, then, may be an unconscious effort to avoid repeating the mistake of leaving *is* or *are* out. This is an instance of how a dialect can indirectly influence production of written forms.

Indirect influence can also be found when dialect combines with writing problems shared by all beginning writers to produce certain tendencies in the writing of speakers

of nonstandard dialects. Writing samples from nonstandard dialect speakers reflect only selected features from the spoken dialect; other, equally frequent characteristics of speech are seldom found. Some of those that occur are apparently related to general writing development as well. Their use in speech reinforces the developmental factor. One study, which compared a large amount of spoken and written data from both standard and nonstandard dialect speakers at all age levels, found that all writers, regardless of dialect background, omitted certain grammatical suffixes to some extent in early writing. These included the verbal *-s* ending (giving *he walk*), the plural ending (as in *many game* from the sample composition), and the past ending *-ed* (*last summer she move to Texas*). For all groups in the sample, the suffixes were sometimes absent, but the frequency was much higher for the nonstandard dialect speakers who also use these features in their speech to varying extents. This indicates that the absence of suffixes in writing is not solely a product of dialect influence, but dialect appears to contribute to it. The influence from dialect is thus indirect in that it combines with a general tendency in writing development to produce a feature of the writing.

Most teachers would agree that the ability to write clear, coherent passages is the most important goal of writing instruction. However, if there are errors in usage, like a verb form that's wrong or a double negative, those forms are bound to detract from the overall product. How do you cope with this problem without stifling a student's desire to write?

Several interesting suggestions have been made for dealing with this issue. One approach suggests that special attention can be given to teaching editing skills to eliminate the nonstandard features from writing. This could be added to any effective program of teaching writing, and the emphasis would remain on developing the necessary composing skills. Nonstandard features such as the absence of suffixes do not involve lack of knowledge of the concept. They can be changed during revision without affecting the composing process if editing rules for their correction can be established. A proponent of this approach cautions, however, that the place of editing skills "in the total teaching of writing should not be overemphasized, as they often are now." There is a danger that students may become so anxious about producing a standard grammar that they are unable to write (Whiteman, *Dialect Influence in Writing*).

Other suggested approaches deal more with creating higher interest in writing activities, assuming that more practice will accomplish developing the necessary skill in writing acceptable standard English. One method emphasizes providing a variety of writing experiences. Practice in writing with different purposes is undertaken, such as in personal letters, business letters, filling out forms, autobiographies, research reports, critiques, etc. Another approach relies heavily on peer interaction in developing writing skills. For instance, an autobiography is assigned as a writing task. The students work together and read drafts aloud to each other, revising in later drafts at all levels of composition (not simply to correct dialect influence). The resulting papers are also analyzed in class and general areas of revision are extracted and presented by the instructor. It has also been suggested that aspects of writing like punctuation, as well as editing for nonstandard English features, are most effectively taught during group

discussions of one participant's writing. In this way, the conventions are explained in context and their importance to the readers is made clearer.

How can you teach children who speak a nonstandard dialect to spell, especially when most methods are so heavily based on sounding out words?

The problems associated with sounding out words to arrive at their spellings do not appear to be that much greater for speakers of nonstandard dialects than for other speakers. All speakers are faced with the conventions of English spelling in which even some simple words like *could* or *tough* (especially compared to *though*) cannot be spelled predictably on the basis of the sounds involved. It seems likely, then, that a child who pronounces *toof* can adjust to the standard spelling *tooth* as well as another child who says *tuff* learns to spell it *tough*. Nonstandard dialect speakers may, however, make different mistakes in attempting spellings at various stages, which may draw undue attention to their spelling "problem." This potential difficulty can be overcome if a teacher is aware of the pronunciation features of the dialects spoken by the students so that the sound differences can be taken into proper account.

Do tests of writing ability pose particular problems for nonstandard dialect speakers?

Tests of writing competence are problematic in many respects for all students; however, they may be even more problematic for nonstandard dialect speakers because of what they typically test. Most agree that the key to good writing lies in the composing processes rather than in the mechanics of writing. However, many assessment techniques rely on an evaluation of mechanical aspects through short-answer questions, since it is difficult to rate samples of writing objectively. Tests of mechanics and usage often focus on precisely those areas where there is likely to be dialect influence from a nonstandard dialect, in an attempt to examine the ability to recognize "acceptable written standard English." For example, a student may be asked to recognize a "usage problem" in sentences like:

The woodsman felled the maple tree with hardly no effort.

I can't hardly raise my hand more than three feet above the board.

These items, from the *Differential Aptitude Test*, "Language Usage" section, are typical of the questions which ask a student to recognize a nonstandard structure as unacceptable usage. In this case, two items on a 44-item test treat multiple negation involving the adverb *hardly*, a commonly used structure in many nonstandard dialects. In fact, a close examination showed that 25 percent of the items in the test involved features that are characteristic of many nonstandard dialects. Bias in objective tests of writing may also come from sources like differing conceptions of what constitutes good style according to different cultural groups. For example, an item in which the correct answer requires the choice of "reach my destination" over "get there" appeals to a value on the use of a kind of "superstandard" English in writing. Thus, objective tests of usage and mechanics may be harder for students from nonstandard dialect backgrounds because these tests tend to focus on points of dialect differences in usage. Alternatively, they may require choices based on values that are not shared by all groups.

Objective tests of writing are also criticized because they fail to tap the crucial aspects of writing. Many observers point out that ability to recognize acceptable usage in short-answer questions (a typical test format) is no indication that a student can write well. However, several researchers have noted that these tests may have some predictive value, in that students who do well on them tend to do well in college writing courses.

Would tests that involve essays or other samples of writing by the student be fairer?

While this approach may have a better chance of giving a fair assessment, and a more descriptive one, there are still problems in the sampling and in the scoring. Some critics observe that it is inappropriate to judge an individual's writing ability on the basis of a limited sample of one or two short essays. This would naturally apply to all students equally. The scoring objections, though, may contain special implications for speakers from nonstandard dialect backgrounds. Depending on the rater, use of certain structures in the writing regarded as errors may lead to a lower overall score being assigned than would otherwise be given. For example, one rater may consider a feature like suffix absence to be a very severe problem and may be unable to see any positive qualities in a passage when it contains such "errors." There is also some possibility of cultural bias introduced when topics are assigned by the test, although this may be minimized when reasonable choices are provided. It is generally agreed that the major difficulties in composition tests emerge from questions of scoring.

There are apparently many problems in standardized tests for evaluating writing ability. Where does this leave the language arts teacher who must deal with writing assessment on a daily basis?

The language arts teacher is probably in a much better position to make assessments than the scorer of a standardized test. These diagnostic assessments can also provide the basis for subsequent instructional activities. Some researchers have indicated that an important step in the assessment process is recognizing the different dimensions of writing problems—those of organization and composing, mechanical skills, and dialect influence. From these, priorities may be set in the development of writing skills. For instance, theme development and the logical progression of a thought may be given first priority at one stage of development, followed by an emphasis on mechanical skills at another stage, and dialect influence at still another stage (an ordering suggested by some investigators). Assessment at each stage would be focused on the dimension of writing being treated. The ultimate goal is to develop writing skill with none of these problems, but the goal may well be reached most effectively by dealing with the three levels somewhat separately.

Suggested Readings

A project to study the development of writing in children is currently being conducted by Donald Graves and colleagues. Preliminary reports, such as Graves' "Research Doesn't Have To Be Boring" and "Andrea Learns To Make Writing Hard" by Lucy McCormick Calkins, have begun to come from the project. Although interest in writing development appears to be on the rise, there is little information available on writing and dialect differences. One collection of articles on this topic is scheduled to appear soon, however, which will be a useful source of additional information—

Variation in Writing: Functional and Linguistic-Cultural Differences, edited by Marcia Farr Wpiteman. It contains articles reporting research, such as Whiteman's "Dialect Influence in the Writing of Nonstandard Speakers," as well as those concerned with instruction and assessment procedures, such as "Teaching Teachers about Teaching Writing to Students from Varied Linguistic, Social, and Cultural Groups," by Carol E. Reed.

INTEGRATING DIALECT DIVERSITY INTO LANGUAGE ARTS

It's clear that teachers need to know about dialects in order to understand the oral and written language behavior of their students. Would any of this information be useful to the students as well?

Many treatments of dialects are concerned solely with the accommodation that must be made in the education process because different groups use different patterns of speaking. Few, however, have considered language variation as a valuable resource rather than a liability. Some educators are now encouraging the active study of dialects—including nonstandard ones—within the curriculum, both for its contribution in terms of exciting subject matter and its contribution to a greater understanding of cultural diversity. The integration of dialect diversity into the language arts curriculum can benefit standard and nonstandard dialect speakers alike.

What would "integrating dialect diversity into language arts" entail?

A number of the more recent language arts materials developed for both primary and secondary levels have given some attention to the nature of dialect diversity. This is one level of integration, where dialect differences are treated as an interesting topic within language arts study. For example, a unit on vocabulary differences from different parts of the country may be included. There are, in addition, more comprehensive ways in which dialects can be approached as an active object of study for the students and as a key to insights about language that would be almost impossible to get from secondary sources.

Every school has nearby communities which are linguistically interesting both within themselves and in how they compare with other communities. They can be valuable sources of data for the students, giving them an opportunity for first-hand observation of dialect diversity. (This can, of course, probably be accomplished within the school, but going out into the community will seem more like research, at least at first.) Consider, for example, a student in New York City. For the most part, individuals in that area are aware of dialect differences between speakers from their region and other regions of the United States. Unfortunately, in many cases, such diversity is often seen in terms of unwarranted stereotypes rather than as a valid object of study in order to determine the nature of these differences (consider the topic of "Brooklynese"). Data from some of the New York communities can provide a base from which an accurate understanding of the systematic nature of dialects can be developed. Both individual introspection on the part of the students and collection of samples of speech from other residents in the area may serve as a data base.

What exactly can be done with this kind of data? How will this relate to language arts?

Data from speech communities around the school can be useful in a number of ways. Specific exercises can be designed dealing with particular features of a dialect. For example, a class of students might consider the use of structures like *He come here yesterday*. In collecting similar instances from the speech they hear around them, some students may notice that *have came* also occurs. When they find instances like *knowed*, *I seen it*, or *have went*, they may begin to notice interesting patterns in terms of which verbs seem to take different forms from those in their standard school materials. They may also notice patterns in terms of the degree to which different people tend to use forms like these.

From an investigation of past tense verb forms, students can be led to make many valuable observations. First they will have to consider the question of standard usage, in using it as a basis for comparison. Then they will need to consider the system of irregular verbs in English, so they can identify those which do not take the regular past tense ending *-ed* (like *knew* or *came*). At this point, the class might even consider some facts in the history of English, in order to find out where these irregular verbs come from. They could look into the older patterns where there were more extensive endings used on verbs, and see that today's irregular verbs are the descendents of the strong verbs of earlier periods in the development of English. In looking at the different forms used by different speakers, they could also find out some principles about language. For instance, several of the patterns that emerge in nonstandard use of irregular verbs involve processes of "regularization." The use of *knowed* or *growed* may occur where the regular *-ed* ending is used rather than an irregular form, showing how languages treat irregularity. There may also be controversy over verbs like *dive* or *sneak*, where different members of the class and community may prefer the regular or irregular version *(dived/dove, sneaked/snuck)*. This is a case where a single, accepted standard form is not necessarily found. There are numerous other lines of inquiry that can open up from the initial investigation of a feature like irregular verb usage. With some planning, students working through a unit like this could learn a great deal about their language and their community.

Further value comes from the opportunity for students to engage in a kind of "scientific investigation." Examining how speakers in their community use language provides a natural laboratory for the students to make generalizations based on an array of data. Their own knowledge of the language can form the basis for hypothesizing rules which govern the use of particular linguistic items. These hypotheses, formulated on the basis of initial observation, can then be checked against additional data that they can also provide, or obtain from other speakers. In a sense, then, hypothesis construction and testing as an approach to the nature of scientific inquiry can be examined through the unique laboratory of language. This training gives such a program value beyond what can be learned about the language.

Teaching students about the scientific method can be done in a lot of different ways. Why should anyone go through all the trouble of bringing it into language arts instruction?

The investigation of dialects serves a number of different functions apart from its contribution to the overall curriculum. It has been recommended as a way to get at the attitudes about language held by all students in the class, and to enhance self-awareness and understanding of cultural diversity. Using language as a subject,

attitudes toward differences between people can be explored, and the integrity of all cultural (and language) groups can be emphasized. If the whole class has a perspective on standard and nonstandard forms of language, a healthier environment can be created—an environment in which the nonstandard dialect speakers can maintain their native forms of speech while acquiring the standard forms where needed.

The use of the community as a resource in language arts can have other advantages as well. Sending students into the community can contribute to the preservation of cultural and oral traditions of the region and provide a rewarding learning experience. A model for this approach is found in the successful *Foxfire* collections compiled by Eliot Wigginton. Wigginton, a teacher in an Appalachian community in Georgia, began with the idea of having his students put together a magazine simply as a way of making language arts more interesting. The bulk of the magazine was composed of stories about traditions from the area—folk tales, superstitions, and reports on events in the community's history. The magazine not only succeeded in terms of the language arts experience, but preserved some of the local traditions while enhancing the students' educational experiences. Another way to use the community as a resource is to have members of the community visit the classroom.

The concept of using dialect diversity (and the cultural diversity that accompanies it) as a resource in the language arts curriculum presents a viewpoint very different from many traditional approaches. Instead of seeing differences as barriers to be overcome, proponents of this approach have found that the differences provide fascinating topics for study.

Suggested Readings

The integration of material on dialect diversity into language arts instruction has not been widely discussed as yet. Many instructional programs have begun to include small components that treat variation in language, but extensive incorporation of such material has not appeared. The series of *Foxfire* books, edited by Eliot Wigginton, demonstrates the usefulness of such an approach and the interest it can generate. For anyone wishing to implement this technique, *Exploring Dialects*, the second booklet of this series, contains more information on specific details and gives some guidance on how to pursue the investigation of dialect forms in a particular community.

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